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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 004997

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DHAHRAN SENDS
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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST ACCEPTS FORMAL ROLE ON HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION

REF: RIYADH 3841

Classified by Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for
reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Ibrahim Al-Mugaiteeb, President of the unregistered Human Rights First Society, told the CG on June 17 that he had accepted a formal role with the government-affiliated Human Rights Commission (HRC) run by Dr. Turki Al-Sudairy. Al-Mugaiteeb said that Al-Sudairy had offered him a position on HRC's board. After deliberating with various contacts in the international human rights community, Al-Mugaiteeb said, he turned down a place on the board but recently agreed to be the "head" of the HRC in the Eastern Province (EP), with special responsibility for Shi'a and Ismaili issues in the EP and Najran, respectively. Al-Mugaiteeb noted that he initially suspected the offer of a board position to be the first step in an SAG "buy out" and said that he warned Al-Sudairy that he might be a liability to the HRC because he "saw it as a duty to speak out" (reftel).

¶2. (C) Al-Mugaiteeb said that the Kingdom's most pressing human rights issues revolved around the Ismailis in Najran. "I used to think the Shi'a had it bad," he noted, "until I went to Najran and saw how repressed the Ismailis there are. Really, the situation is so bad it could explode." Al-Mugaiteeb mentioned two issues of particular concern: environmental, health, and safety problems related to a mining venture, and the fate of eleven prisoners who had recently finished serving their sentences but had yet to be released. Al-Mugaiteeb said he had received documentation from contacts in Najran showing that elements in the government bureaucracy had been covering up significant problems related to mining in the town of Bir Asker, outside of Najran, and that even a directive from the King to resolve the problems was being ignored. Moving to the second issue, Al-Mugaiteeb explained that the eleven prisoners had been sentenced over five years ago to prison terms for arms smuggling. They had finished their prison terms but now, according to Al-Mugaiteeb, the government was not going to release them. "Naif (the Interior Minister) thinks he can do whatever he wants regardless of the court's sentence. He thinks they are dangerous, so he is refusing to release them. The whole issue could blow up." Al-Mugaiteeb said that the current governor of Najran, Mashaal bin Saud, was "hated" by the Ismailis.

¶3. (C) Al-Mugaiteeb cited the case of former HRC employee Mohammed Al-Wasal as an example of both the extent of government corruption and complicity in human rights abuses and the reason he decided to work with the HRC. Al-Wasal, Al-Mugaiteeb explained, had deliberately altered a letter Al-Mugaiteeb prepared for Al-Sudairy on the mining issue,

without telling either Al-Sudairy or Al-Mugaiteeb. "I am sure he was put on the payroll by Naif," Al-Mugaiteeb continued, noting with satisfaction his role in the exposure of Al-Wasal's activities and the subsequent termination of his employment by Al-Sudairy. Asked by the CG whether the HRC could have lasting positive impact on human rights in Saudi Arabia, Al-Mugaiteeb replied, "Turki is serious, but the question is does he have enough help and support around him. At this stage, the answer is no. But the HRC will do more than the National Society for Human Rights, which is garbage. Its board members care about how much they get paid from the society's government endowment than they do about human rights." Al-Mugaiteeb claimed that NSHR board members had missed a key session in the trial of three reformers because of a board meeting "in which the sole agenda item was whether board members should receive 10,000 or 5,000 riyals for attending each meeting."

14. (C) Al-Mugaiteeb gave a pessimistic assessment of King Abdullah. "He has not tackled real reform yet. Everything he has done is just cosmetic. Look at the recommendations from the National Dialogue - not one has been implemented. It is hard for him - he has lots of enemies around him." Al-Mugaiteeb noted that reformers in the Kingdom were growing more mistrustful of the U.S. and its commitment to democratization. "The high point was Secretary Rice's press conference in the summer of 2005, when she called for the release of the three reformers. But the last time she was here, she was just polishing the shoes of Saud Al-Faisal." To rebuild trust between reformers and the U.S., Al-Mugaiteeb proposed that he arrange meetings with various reformers, including "liberal Islamists" like Abdullah Al Hamid and Sheikh Solaiman Al-Rushoodi, liberals, Shi'a, and Ismailis.

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15. (C) Al-Mugaiteeb also discussed the carrot and stick approach the SAG used to try to co-opt dissidents, including himself. In addition to denying him the right to travel and subjecting him to repeated questioning by the Mubahith after he spoke out against SAG human rights practices on an Al-Jazeera program in 2003, Al-Mugaiteeb noted, the SAG had also intimidated and harassed his family. The Mubahith had called his brother and son in for repeated questioning, he claimed, and the SAG had delayed processing routine license renewals for businesses owned by his cousins in Al-Ahsa. As for the carrot, Al-Mugaiteeb said that the Mubahith knew "to the last Saudi riyal" about the SR 400,000 in loans he had taken out to finance his organization in its first years and had offered him the opportunity for "tasheeh al-awda'" ("correcting the conditions"), i.e. a cash payment to facilitate his return to the fold. Al-Mugaiteeb said he refused the offer, but noted wistfully that "the going rate for tasheeh al-awda' is 5 million riyals - that's what the government paid to buy out Ayedh Al-Gurni."

16. (C) Comment: Most of the Consulate's reform-minded contacts share Al-Mugaiteeb's perceptions that U.S. commitment to reform in Saudi Arabia is lagging and that King Abdullah has not taken meaningful steps toward reform. These contacts speculate that U.S. interests in a steady oil supply and regional stability, particularly with regards to Iraq and Iran, have caused the USG to pull back from its call for reform. Our reform-minded contacts generally agree that King Abdullah's intentions are good, but they lament the lack of significant reforms to date. They acknowledge that the National Dialogue is important symbolically, for example, but they say that King Abdullah has not initiated the long and difficult process of spreading the concepts of tolerance, understanding, and dialogue through the government bureaucracy (particularly as manifested in the curriculum, the judicial system, and the religious authorities) and into society. End comment.

17. (SBU) Bio note: Al-Mugaiteeb said that doctors in Germany had discovered a brain tumor during his recent stay

there for treatment of colon cancer and back problems. An operation to remove it, he said, had been unsuccessful and had led to his contracting meningitis. He plans to seek further treatment in the U.S. in the near future. He clearly realizes he may have a terminal illness, as he spoke of needing to bring his son to the U.S. to be with his wife in case he died there. End bio note.

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